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ABSTRACT

Creative writing is considered as a form of creative expression in which the child expresses his ideas, feelings, or reactions. This expression is original and spontaneous, and allows the child to organize his experiences so that they assume a personal meaning. With this experience, the child, through the process of symbolization, adds to his identity. The methodology and creative process steps in a creative writing experience are: (1) motivation period in which to generate interest, develop a mood, and create a need to write; (2) exchange of ideas to crystallize each child's thinking; (3) writing period; (4) exchange of ideas; and (5) follow-up activities, if appropriate. The means for accomplishing each of these steps are described. Since the goal of the experience is self-understanding and awareness of the world in relation to self, the teacher will have to know children well, participate openly with them, and observe them closely both in the process and following it in order to sense growth. Examination of the product as to uniqueness, ability to communicate, mood or feeling, effective use of language, and the effect of the writing on the audience can be of value. (DB)

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Creative Writing for Self-Understanding: Approaches and Outcomes

An address presented at the 60th Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Atlanta, Georgia on Friday, November 27, 1970 from 3:15 - 5:00 P.M.

TE 002 454

by
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Introduction

The topic "Creative Writing for Self-Understanding: Approaches and Outcomes" can be considered from many viewpoints and at many levels. For this reason, it will be desirable initially to delimit the scope of consideration by defining certain terms.

First, the phrase young children which appears in the title of this program. In my consideration, this will focus primarily on children from four or five to seven or eight, or from a pre-school kindergarten situation through the primary level or typical second, or perhaps early third grade. This demarcation is made since it appears that children of nine differ in many aspects of practical significance to a creative writing program. Among these are characteristics of creative development, relationship with peers and adults, independence, and ability in the mechanics of written expression, perhaps most importantly in relation to freedom of expression, spelling ability, and speed and stamina in handwriting.

The concept contained in the term self-understanding as it relates to creative writing, or more broadly to creative expression, is well expressed by David Holbrook in his paper "Creativity in the English Programme" from the Dartmouth Seminar. He said:

> Creativity cannot satisfactorily be introduced into an English program unless creativity is accepted as a basis of our approach to English teaching as an art. Effective English teaching, in that it has to do with the whole complex of language in our lives, has to do with the whole problem of the individual identity and how it develops. In this words are crucial, and so in English teaching we cannot separate words from the dynamics of personality, nor from the processes of symbolism by which human beings seek to deal with their inward life.[1]

This stress of the Dartmouth Seminar on language for self-discovery is further highlighted by Holbrook in the statement that in English we are concerned with "literacy in its deepest and widest sense--the capacity to use words to deal with inner and outer experience."[2] This goal to help a child use language for self-discovery by making reality from his experiences through language symbolism is implicit in the term self-understanding.

Creative writing may require definition. We can begin with the distinction between creative and functional writing. In creative writing, or personal writing, to quote Burrows, Jackson, and Saunders in the book They All Want To Write, children "wrote or dictated their ideas for what primarily should be normal and honest purpose of all creative effort: each strove to please himself or to entertain others."[3] In functional writing, a utilitarian function is involved either in recording information for another's use or for ones own later use.

[1]David Holbrook, "Creativity in the English Programme," Creativity in English, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield (Champaign, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English, 1968) p. 1.
[2]Ibid.,p.2.
[3]Alvina Treut Burrows, Doris C. Jackson, and Dorothy O. Saunders, They All Want To Write: Written English in the Elementary School, third edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964) p. 5.

Another distinction appears important, namely that in creative expression the ideas are new or unique to the individual, whereas in functional writing the concepts involved have generally been dealt with mentally before. In the process of self-discovery then, even if a child is organizing his own actual experience through creative expression, the idea as spontaneously perceived and symbolized is "new" to the child.

Obviously, there are shades of gray in this continuum of creative to functional writing in which direct experience, diary, friendly letter, essay, and editorial might well fall.

T.1

Creative Writing ← → Functional Writing

Direct Experience
Diary
Friendly Letter
Essay
Editorial

Thus creative writing might simply be considered as one form of creative expression in which the child expresses his ideas, feelings, or reactions in original, spontaneous, and unique ways for him at that point in time. In doing this, the child organizes his experience to make it meaningful to himself and thus adds to his identity through the process of symbolization.

The term creative in relation to its development in the classroom bears mention. Many definitions of creativity are contained in the literature. No attempt will be made here to summarize them. Very simply, for purposes of the child's

creative efforts, I have described creatively as "doing something 'different' which makes you feel 'special'"[4] Obviously, "different" and "special" are to be considered in terms of the individual child at a particular point in time. Further, the focus is much more on the process in which the child is involved, than on the finished product.

With this background of an overall goal of <u>self-understanding</u> through creative expression, let us consider approaches or methods to be utilized with young children and some of the outcomes to be realized.

<u>Approaches to Creative Expression</u>

In discussing approaches to creative writing with young children it is essential to broaden the area of concern to creative expression. This is true because of the primacy of talk for children. Written expression, as a system, is more abstract than is oral. Graphemic symbols are really symbols for symbols. This greater degree of abstraction is particularly important for the young child who is still in the process of developing control of language as a means of symbolism. In addition, recognition must be given to the possible inhibition of free, spontaneous expression which is imposed when the child is made responsible for the mechanics of written expression.

With the young child, then, creative expression must begin with talk about the problem and move to writing, or dictation in which the teacher assumes responsibility for recording, only after a need for expression has been developed. The child

[4]Beatrice A. Turner, "Developing a Program of Instruction in Creative Writing in the Elementary School," <u>Current Perspectives in Elementary Education</u> (Des Moines: Iowa Elementary Principals, Iowa State Education Association, 1967), p. 47.

should become his own scribe only when he can do so without interruption and inhibition of his creative expression, that is when his confidence in self-expression can tolerate the move to inner speech and when control of handwriting skill and spelling are at a point where frustration of the major purpose---self-discovery--is not encountered. This generally would not occur before the end of the first grade. Even then experiences in which the teacher serves as scribe should be interspersed.

In order to consider approaches or methodology for creative expression it is necessary to examine the nature of the creative process. Similar descriptions of creativity as a process are found in the literature. Those of Torrance[5], Marksberry[6], and Logan and Logan[7] have been selected. In each, a stage of problem awareness is included. Marksberry and Logan and Logan recognize a period of conscious or unconscious thought in which the problem is mulled over and new perceptions are gained. A period in which the idea, or a solution to the problem, begins to take focus is next. A period of testing, perfecting, and elaboration follows. Communication of the results completes the process.

[5] E. Paul Torrance, What Research Says to the Teacher: Creativity (Washington, D. C.: Department of Classroom Teachers, American Educational Research Association of the National Education Assoc., 1963) p. 4.
[6] Mary Lee Marksberry, Foundations of Creativity (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963) pp. 17-19.
[7] Lillian M. Logan and Virgil G. Logan, A Dynamic Approach to Language Arts (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Company of Canada Limited, 1967) p. 305.

Creativity as a Process

Torrance	Parkhurst	Logan and Logan
Sensing problem or gaps in information	Period of preparation	Cognition-awareness of a problem which can best be solved through writing
	Period of incubation	Conception-prelude to the moment of insight involving conscious and unconscious assimilation of ideas gained through observation, experience, memory, and/or imagination
Forming ideas or hypotheses	Period of insight, illumination or inspiration	Combustion-the ignition of the spark, the idea takes fire
Testing and modifying these hypotheses	Period of verification, elaboration, perfecting and evaluation	Consummation-perfection of the expression, the rewriting, and the polishing process
Communicating the results		Communication--the sharing of the product

For instructional purposes it is useful to translate the stages of the creative process into methodological steps in a creative writing experience which define the instructional tasks to be accomplished. I have used a five-step sequence for this purpose.[8]

T.3

Methodology and the Creative Process
Steps in a Creative Writing Experience

1. Motivation period in which children's attention is focused on a broad topic in order to generate interest, develop a mood, and create a need to write.
2. Exchange of ideas to crystallize each child's thinking.
3. Writing period.
4. Exchange of ideas.
5. Follow-up activities, if appropriate.

The motivation step should be designed to focus children's attention on a broad topic with which they have had some experience. A need for self-expression is generated through use of stimulators involving discussion, use of literature, pictures, objects, films, records or tapes, and reference to real and vicarious experiences of the children. The motivational devices should be used to heighten awarenesses, build perceptions, and to elicit response from each child. The topic for a group experience must be broad and must include avenues of appeal or contact for all children in the group. The motivators should be used as a springboard to encourage individual reaction and elaboration; not as a model or framework to be filled in. In working with group dictation with young children a picture or series of pictures which

[8]Turner, op. cit., pp. 52-54.

present an open-ended situation are often useful in that they provide a focal point for the group.

Selection of the picture is critical. It must relate to children's experiences and interests either actual or vicarious. While the identification of topics of interest for writing at various levels is an area in which research is needed, it appears that children have interest and need to write about those things which they enjoy being read to or reading about -- an area in which we have greater research evidence.

It appears that children prefer pictures of real people or animals over the "storybook type". Fluffy yellow ducks tend not to promote a need for personal exploration.

Pictures used initially may be more closely related to the child's daily experiences of family situations and child activities. As children become more creative they respond to the more unusual picture, for example Santa wrapped in a red blanket soaking his feet in a pan of hot water, a lion in a city street, or a baby pouring a bowl of spaghetti on his head.

To be productive for creative expression a picture should present an unresolved problem which could have come about in many ways and to which many solutions are possible. A picture which suggests only one solution has limited potential for stimulating creative thinking or self-discovery. Magazine ads are a good source of picture stimulators of this type.

In presenting a picture stimulator it is well to ask children to think and talk about the topic a bit before its presentation. In this way immediate sensing of a problem and reaction to it are promoted. This also lessens the tendency to tell just the story in the picture.

Children can be encouraged to identify topics they would like to write about. The kindergartens in our laboratory school last year asked for a war picture and wrote this story in response to the least bloody news photo the teacher could find. It is apparent that they were engaged in discovery of important events in their world.[9]

T.4 (see page 10a.)

Books are also useful in motivation. Many of the concept books related to shapes, sizes, the alphabet, and various feelings or emotion almost beg to be written.

As indicated by the double arrow, the second stage, exchanging of ideas, overlaps the first. In fact, the sooner and the more frequently children can be encouraged to react personally; the more successful will be the motivational sequence in developing a need for personal exploration and expression. There should, however,be a pulling together of ideas which encourages children to talk about their emerging idea in order to crystallize it enough that it is not lost in the transition to writing. Recognition of the fleeting nature of spontaneous, creative ideas underlines the importance of this exchange. Care must be taken, however, that the child does not express all of his ideas or in group dictation that consensus as to outcome does not occur. If this happens children may have no further need to express and writing or dictation may become merely a mechanical process of filling in an outline. Each child should be actively generating ideas

[9]Patricia Neal, "An Analysis of the Language Used by Kindergarten Children in Creative Writing by Examination of the Syntactic Patterns and the Subjective Quality of the Stories" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Iowa, 1970), p. 168.

T.4

April 27, 1970

The Big War

Once upon a time some men started a war. The President fights wars. This war is bad because people get killed. They take them on the ambulance helicopter.

They rode up in a big truck. They ran and hid behind rocks. When they saw their enemies, they shot.

One guy shot another and blood dripped out of him. One guy got shot in the arm and he wasn't hurt. The ambulance came and took him to the hospital. By the time he got there, he was dead. He said to the Doctor, "Am I a goner?"

And the Doctor said, "Yes!"

The rest of the men ran, after a shot, to different places. They hid all around rocks and back of rocks. A bomb came along and hurt 50 men.

Then an ambulance came. They took them to the hospital and fixed them all up and they were alive again.

Then the ambulance caught on fire. The fire boat came along and started spraying because there's a river. The fire department came, too. On its way the fire department caught on fire. The top of the ambulance was on fire and it rolled into the water.

The President stopped the war. They called a truce. The two bosses teamed together and had peace.

throughout the writing process as was a late first grader who called his teacher over to read the first part of his story. She said, "Gee, Tim, that's exciting! I can't wait to see how it will end." Tim gave an enthusiastic hunch of his shoulders and said, "Me too."

Worthy of mention in this content is Marksberry's statement that while stages can be identified in the creative process, it is "a total pattern of behavior in which the various stages overlap and interweave from the start of the activity until the formation of the final product. For example, instead of one illumination there is a series of illuminations which continues throughout the process."[10]

In the writing period young children dictate their ideas to the catalytic-scribe or, after mechanics are well enough under control, write individually. In group dictation the teacher serves as a catalytic agent, drawing out ideas and extending them by reflecting them back to the individual or the group. All responses are positively reinforced and those which seem to receive group approval and which fit the emerging story line are recorded in the child's own words. Teachers must exercise care that they do not edit as they record. If our purpose is self-discovery through language symbolism it is essential to use the child's language -- not one foreign to him. Periodic rereading serves to stimulate children and to promote a sequentially developed story line. As the story nears conclusion the teachers should help children to find a satisfactory ending. The story should be reread for proofreading purposes so that children can be sure

[10] Marksberry, op. cit., p. 19.

it is just as they wish it and that no errors in recording have been made. Titling can then take place.

In individual writing the teacher should during the writing period serve as a catalyst, an audience, and an aid for mechanics as requested by the children. Since talk is so basic the child may need to interact with his idea to the teacher or another child rather than to be alone with it. Provision should be made for this need. Again proofreading should be encouraged, not for mechanical perfection, but to be sure it says what I want it to say.

As creative expression began with the interaction of talk it should now return to it in the sharing period. Children should voluntarily be given the opportunity to share their solutions to the problem. A set for creative listening in which the listener enters in imaginatively should be developed. By becoming involved in other's solutions, the creative process can be heightened for each individual. Interaction should focus on ideas and effective ways of expressing them through language, not on elements of form.

Reading of a group dictated story after a brief lapse of time during which a set for creative listening is developed permits the children to experience their solution, thus extending self-exploration.

If a sense of involvement in the problem is still high, children may welcome additional avenues of expression for extension of their ideas. Illustration or dramatization of the story or other solutions may provide the child with a means

of extended exploration. For some children one of these modes may be more suitable than the original writing or dictation. The sharing of literature or music related to the topic may also add to the child's awareness of himself and his world in relation to the problem.

Follow-up activities of this sort should be based on the children's involvement with the topic. If a sense of completion has been achieved by them at this point in time, such activities should not be imposed.

Having explored some approaches to creative expression with young children, let us in conclusion focus briefly on the potential outcomes of a program in which creativity is viewed as a means of self-discovery.

Outcomes of A Program of Creative Writing for Self-Understanding

Consideration of outcomes of experiences in creative writing brings us face to face with the question of evaluation. Surely if our goal is self-understanding and awareness of the world in relation to self, we are far more concerned with the nature of the process in which the child engages and the resultant effects on his identity than on the product generated. This being true teachers will have to know children well, participate openly with them, and observe them closely both in the process and following it in order to sense growth. Within this framework, examination of the product based on its uniqueness and power to communicate, the creation of a general mood or feeling, the effective use of language to express the idea, and the general effect on the audience can be of value. This should be done with knowledge of the individual and the process.[11]

[11]Turner, op. cit., p. 66.

Surely the first grade child who in response to a discussion about what they would be when they grew up, wrote the following added to her image of herself:

T.5

I want to be a patntwrire. I will twrle patns in the bands. it will be fun to be a patntwrire.

Twyne
First Grade

So did the second grade child, a very withdrawn little girl, who in response to a discussion about what a friend is wrote:

T.6

Once I had a tree, it was a apple tree, it had red and yellow apples on it. It was a nice tree it had green leaves on it, and it was very pretty and it was a nice tree I like to run around it, and I wish I had it now! my tree was seven years old when it died.

Wendy
Second Grade

Awareness of the word and ability to use language to express their sensory perceptions was experienced by the first graders who wrote animal riddles and descriptions of the tiniest sound.

T.7

He is growly and usually mean. A pretend one would jump over the rooftops. There are good ones and bad ones. They usually would not smell too well. Can you guess who it is?

Susan
First Grade

(a bear)

The tiniest sound is wind blowing in your hair.

Keith
First Grade

The tiniest sound in the world is a cat drinking milk.

Stephie
First Grade

So to the third grade boy who wrote a poem about fog after consideration of weather and its effect on us.

T.S.

Fog in the Park
For fog's a fuzzy gray cocoon
Just sitting there.
Then suddenly it bursts open
And it's gone.

Peter
Third Grade

Frequent experiences of this type which involve children in exploration of aspects of their world, their relations with others, and of themselves; and which are designed to heighten awareness and stimulate perceptions while creating a need for self-expression cannot help but serve as avenues for growth in self-understanding as children search for and create language to express meanings and feelings both to themselves and others.